

# Landrieu Accused Of Taking Bribe; No Donation-Earmark Quid Pro Quo, She Says

**BYLINE:** S.A. Miller, Washington Times

**SECTION:** NATION; A03

**DATE:** January 9, 2008

A Washington watchdog group yesterday accused Sen. Mary L. Landrieu of taking a bribe.

Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington (CREW) filed a complaint with federal prosecutors accusing the Louisiana Democrat of violating bribery law by sponsoring a \$2 million earmark for Voyager Expanded Learning just four days after the education firm helped give her \$30,000 in campaign contributions.

"Senator Landrieu appears to have traded a \$2 million earmark for \$30,000 in campaign contributions," said Melanie Sloan, CREW's executive director. "Members of Congress need to understand that trading earmarks for campaign funds is illegal - no exceptions."

The group filed complaints with the Justice Department and U.S. attorney's offices in Louisiana and Texas. They also asked the Senate Select Committee on Ethics to investigate the matter.

Mrs. Landrieu called the complaint "factually flawed."

She released three letters dating back to 2001 in which D.C. school officials requested funds for the program and in which New Orleans school officials and a Republican senator vouched for the program.

"At the request of D.C. officials ... and based in part on the program's successful track record in Louisiana, Senator Landrieu secured voluntary funding to make Voyager available to DC. schoolchildren," Landrieu spokesman Adam Sharp said.

According to the complaint, the House approved a \$1 million earmark for Voyager to supply D.C. schools but the program needed a Senate sponsor. Voyager executives turned to Mrs. Landrieu, chairman of the appropriations subcommittee responsible for the District.

Since 1994, Voyager has provided in-school reading programs, math programs and professional-development programs for school districts throughout the country. The company was co-founded by Dallas entrepreneur Randy Best, who CREW notes is a top Republican donor.

After a meeting between company officials and Mrs. Landrieu, a member of her staff asked Mr. Best to hold a fundraiser for the senator. He agreed and collected \$30,000 in contributions from company executives and their family members, according to CREW.

Mrs. Landrieu helped insert the \$2 million earmark for Voyager four days after receiving the donations, the complaint said.

Federal law prohibits public officials from directly or indirectly demanding, receiving, or agreeing to accept anything of value in return for an official act. That can include campaign contributions if a quid pro quo can be demonstrated.

"Senator Landrieu strongly believes that we should not stop seeking new, innovative approaches to educating our young," Mr. Sharp said. "She is also proud of her record of integrity in public service."